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AUTHOR Kalivoda, Theodore B.

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine how commonly-quoted values of foreign language study are actually perceived by students and professors who have taken undergraduate foreign language courses and to determine the implications this information might have for college curriculum planners. Some 177 students and professors participated in the study by completing questionnaires concerning attitudes. Among the findings, it was noted that students generally favored increased amounts of cultural instruction while many opposed the retention of the foreign language requirement. Professors' and students' attitudes conflict in many basic areas. Several tables and sample questionnaires are found in the appendixes. (RL)

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AN INVESTIGATION ON VALUES OF COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

Theodore B. Kalivoda

University of Georgia

The purpose of this study is to determine how commonly quoted values of foreign language study are actually perceived by college students and professors who have taken undergraduate foreign language courses, and to determine what implications this information might have for college curriculum planning.

A total of 177 students and professors participated in the study. Both groups were included in order to present a more comprehensive picture in terms of possible differences in perspective due to age and experience. A third group comprised of college graduates who had studied a foreign language and who are currently employed in various occupational roles will be sampled in the near future to render a view of possibly greater breadth.

The Questionnaire

A two-part questionnaire (Appendix I) was employed to gather information for the study. Part I contains 21 items to be rated on a 5-1 sliding scale (exceptional value to no value). These items reflect values found to be commonly subscribed to in the literature of the field. Items 20 and 21 do not apply to all

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participants, however, and their mean scores are calculated separately from the rest of the study. Part II (second sheet) pertains to general information on the participants' background as well as to their reasons and recommendations for foreign language study. A slightly different form for Part II was used for each of the two participating groups.

The Student Sample

Questionnaires were sent to heads of foreign language departments of five Georgia colleges and universities near the close of the winter quarter, 1971. These questionnaires were distributed to students terminating the basic fourth quarter course in foreign language. All five of the sampled institutions cooperated in the study by returning questionnaires completed by a total of 127 students in Spanish (86), French (21), and German (20).

Students participating in the study had majors in 18 different fields of study (Table I). Student classifications involved 10 freshmen (7.9 percent), 34 sophomores (26.8 percent), 29 juniors (22.8 percent), and 54 seniors (42.5 percent).

Students' Ratings

Mean ratings given each item by students are listed in Table II. Highest mean values (3.7 and 3.6 respectively) were given to items 17 (learning to read the foreign language) and 8 (stimulating

travel to the foreign country). The lowest mean value rating (2.0) was given to items 5 (increasing understanding of ideas and patterns of behavior of minority groups in the U.S.), 12 (improving expression in English), and 19 (help in other college courses). The total mean score for all 19 items was 2.8 which reflects total value of foreign language study as questionable in the eyes of students.

Item 21 (value of foreign language study in making travel in the foreign country more rewarding), answered by 19 of the 127 students, and thus not applicable to the entire student group, yielded a relatively high mean rating of 3.8.

Students were almost equally divided in opinion on whether they would have taken a foreign language had it not been a degree requirement (page 2, item 4 of questionnaire). Sixty-two students (48.8 percent) answered yes, 63 (49.6 percent) answered no, and two students abstained. In regards to recommending foreign language study as a degree requirement, 45 students (35.4 percent) gave positive replies, 80 (63.0 percent) answered negatively, and two students were undecided.

Finally, in reply to the open-ended question on how foreign language study could have been made more meaningful (item 6), 82 students (64.6 percent) offered opinions which fall into eleven categories (Table III). Opinions most frequently voiced reflected a desire for inclusion of more culture instruction and greater emphasis on spoken language.

The Faculty Sample

A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed to full-time professors in 18 different fields in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Georgia (Table I). Sampled professors were those who had studied a foreign language during their undergraduate training, which was determined by personal contact by students of the undergraduate foreign language curriculum course at the University. To insure a greater degree of candidness students requested the professors to leave questionnaires unsigned and to send them by mail directly to the investigator. A total of 50 completed questionnaires (55.6 percent) were returned.

Professors participating in the study had a generous background of foreign language study, which totaled to a mean of 21.6 quarter hours on the college level, and in addition, 1.5 years on the high school level.

Professors' Ratings

Mean ratings for each item are listed in Table II. The highest and lowest mean scores given by professors among the first 19 items of the questionnaire were 3.8 (item 17--learning to read the foreign language) and 1.8 (item 5--increasing understanding of ideas and patterns of behavior of minority groups in the U.S.) respectively. The mean score for the entire 19 items was 2.9,

a low average almost identical to that given by students. However, professors gave an exceptionally low 1.5 mean rating to item 21 (value of foreign language study in making travel in the foreign country more rewarding), which is significantly contrastive to the relatively high 3.5 mean rating given the item by students.

Finally, 69 percent (34 professors) of the faculty group recommended requiring foreign language study as a requirement for the AB degree. This represents a significantly different direction from the negative stand taken by the student sample.

Discussion

A rather dismal picture is seen in the mean ratings given by students and faculty to the overall value of foreign language study. Although many items were given high individual ratings of four and five (exceptional and great value), not one of the 21 items produced a mean rating which reached these levels. Only 10 of the 21 items (47.6 percent) produced mean ratings above 3.0 ("of medium value") by the student group, and 11 items (52.4 percent) produced mean ratings above 3.0 by the faculty group.

Certain factors should be recognized as having possible influence on the mean ratings. It is possible that participants may have deemed foreign language study as important, but not in terms of the values reflected by the items of the questionnaire.

This may be especially true for the large majority of the faculty group who, contradictory to its low rating of questionnaire items, took a favorable stand for foreign language study as a degree requirement. This may indicate that values commonly cited for foreign language study by the foreign language profession do not represent essential values held by the non-foreign language academician.

Another factor for consideration may be that the ratings constitute a reaction not so much against foreign languages themselves but rather against the way they were taught. If this is so, improvement of foreign language teaching within the past few decades which separate the language experiences of the student and faculty groups may not be as extensive as often believed.

In terms of learning the four skills, (items 15-18) it is seen that the student group scored slightly higher (3.3 mean) than the faculty (2.9 mean). The performances of both groups bordered on average, that is, the value of foreign language study in terms of learning listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing was judged by both groups to be near the "medium value" rating (3.0). Depending on the importance one places on one or all of the four skills in the overall value of foreign language study, it may be important to re-assess curriculum strategy in terms of <u>how</u>, <u>when</u>, and <u>where</u> foreign languages

should be taught. For example, in terms of <u>how</u>, perhaps current foreign language courses taken by the student group in Georgia give a disproportionate amount of time to theoretical instruction rather than to functional use for communication (especially oral communication, seeing that reading ability -- item 17 -- constituted the greatest skill development). Then again, it may not be reasonable to expect a more advanced development of the four skills either on the basis of a four-quarter sequence or in terms of 50-minute classes per day. To increase results, either longer language contact or intensive language experiences (at home or abroad) may be needed.

Looking at comparisons between mean ratings by students and faculty on individual items it is seen that each individual item produced relatively low mean scores which fell within a few decimal points of each other. Five items which did not follow this pattern, however, are items 10 (enriching vocabulary in English), 11 (improving understanding of English grammar), 12 (improving ability to express oneself in English), 16 (preparation for understanding the spoken foreign language), and 21 (value of foreign language study in making travel in the foreign country more rewarding). The latter two items scored significantly higher (more than one-half point) among the student group, while the former three were favored by the faculty. In other words, students saw greater

benefits in oral use of the foreign language, while faculty members saw greater application toward facilitating the use of the English language (perhaps because of requirements made of professors for scholarly writing).

In terms of the open-ended question on improving instruction (item 6), students' desire for more culture suggests that this often-quoted goal may be receiving little implementation in foreign language programs. The broadening of one's outlook through learning about the foreign culture is an often-cited concept in defense of foreign language study. It is, in fact, held as a value whose importance compensates for a foreign language experience which does not necessarily produce functional skill with the language. The students' response on culture via the open-ended question and also through items 1-6 which relate to culture (yielding a low total mean value rating of 2.7) suggests that culture instruction in basic foreign language courses may not be what it purports to be.

In summary, this investigation offers some evidence of values held for foreign language study. In spite of its limitations, the investigation offers views which seem worth considering for strengthening the curriculums in Georgia colleges and universities. Further investigation of each area of the study should prove useful for obtaining further data which will provide more detailed direction for curriculum improvement.

TABLE I

FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION

Students		Faculty	
Major Field	Number	Major Field	Number
Advertising	1	Art	1
Anthropology	1	Astronomy	1
Art	4	Biology	1
Biology	5	Botany	2
Chemistry	2	Chemistry	3
Economics	1	Drama	1
Elementary and Special Education	9	English	6
English	18	Geography	5
Geography	1	History	8
Geology	1	Mathematics	3
History	18	Music	2
Journalism	2	Philosophy	2
Mathematics	6	Physics	1
Physics	2	Political Science	3
Political Science	13	Psychology	4
Pre-Medicine	2	Sociology	4
Psychology	3	Speech	2
Sociology	29	Theology	1
Undecided	9	TOTAL	50
TOTAL	127		

TABLE II

MEAN RATINGS ON QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Item Description	Mean Ratings: Students	Mean Ratings: Faculty
1. Increasing your understanding of the geography and history of the foreign country?	2.7	2.6
2. Increasing your understanding of the intellectual and cultural attainments of the foreign country?	3.0	3.1
3. Increasing your understanding of the role of language in determining one's perception of the world around him?	2.8	3.1
4. Increasing your understanding of the ideas and patterns of behavior of the foreign people?	2.9	3.1
5. Increasing your understanding of the ideas and patterns of behavior of minority groups in the U.S.?	2.0	1.8
6. Increasing your understanding of the influence of the foreign culture on American culture?	2.6	2.6
7. Stimulating you to want to learn more about the foreign country and its people?	3.0	3.5
8. Stimulating you to want to travel to the foreign country?	3.6	3.5
9. Making you a better educated person?	3.3	3.6
10. Enriching your vocabulary in English?	2.5	3.3

Table II--Continued

Item	Description	Mean Ratings: Students	Mean Ratings: Faculty
11.	Improving your understanding of English grammar?	2.5	3.2
12.	Improving your ability to express yourself in English?	2.0	2.6
13.	Increasing your understanding of foreign words and expressions encountered in movies, reading material, and on radio and television?	3.5	3.6
14.	Increasing your understanding of the varied use of speech organs in different languages?	2.7	2.4
15.	Preparing you to speak the foreign language?	3.0	2.6
16.	Preparing you to understand the foreign language when spoken?	3.3	2.6
17.	Preparing you to read the foreign language?	3.7	3.8
18.	Preparing you to express yourself in writing the foreign language?	3.0	2.4
19.	Helping you in other college courses?	2.0	2.3
20.	(ANSWER THIS ITEM ONLY IF YOU ARE GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE) What value has your foreign language study had in helping you in your job?	---	3.0
21.	(ANSWER THIS ITEM ONLY IF YOU HAVE TRAVELED TO THE COUNTRY WHERE YOUR FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN) Of what value was your foreign language study in making your travel in the foreign country more rewarding?	3.5	1.5

TABLE III

STUDENT SUGGESTIONS FOR

IMPROVING FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Suggestions	Frequency
1. Greater emphasis on culture	26
2. Greater emphasis on oral language	24
3. Greater involvement of fun activities in the foreign language, and less on grammar study	7
4. Greater emphasis on meaningfulness, and less on mechanical-type drilling	6
5. Greater involvement with current newspapers and magazines rather than with literary works	6
6. Teach the language abroad rather than on the American campus	6
7. Teach the courses more intensively in a shorter period of time	2
8. Bar native speakers from taking the course with Americans	2
9. Better placement of students according to ability	1
10. Smaller classes, and more individual oral work	1
11. Greater emphasis on quality rather than on quantity of instruction	1

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

KEY

5 - of exceptional value
4 - of great value
3 - of medium value
2 - of little value
1 - of no value

OF WHAT VALUE WAS YOUR COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY IN TERMS OF:

1. Increasing your understanding of the geography and history of the foreign country? (5 4 3 2 1)
2. Increasing your understanding of the intellectual and cultural attainments of the foreign country? (5 4 3 2 1)
3. Increasing your understanding of the role of language in determining one's perception of the world around him? (5 4 3 2 1)
4. Increasing your understanding of the ideas and patterns of behavior of the foreign people? (5 4 3 2 1)
5. Increasing your understanding of the ideas and patterns of behavior of minority groups in the U.S.? (5 4 3 2 1)
6. Increasing your understanding of the influence of the foreign culture on American culture? (5 4 3 2 1)
7. Stimulating you to want to learn more about the foreign country and its people? (5 4 3 2 1)
8. Stimulating you to want to travel to the foreign country? (5 4 3 2 1)
9. Making you a better educated person? (5 4 3 2 1)
10. Enriching your vocabulary in English? (5 4 3 2 1)
11. Improving your understanding of English grammar? (5 4 3 2 1)
12. Improving your ability to express yourself in English? (5 4 3 2 1)
13. Increasing your understanding of foreign words and expressions encountered in movies, reading material, and on radio and television? (5 4 3 2 1)
14. Increasing your understanding of the varied use of speech organs in different languages? (5 4 3 2 1)
15. Preparing you to speak the foreign language? (5 4 3 2 1)
16. Preparing you to understand the foreign language when spoken? (5 4 3 2 1)
17. Preparing you to read the foreign language? (5 4 3 2 1)
18. Preparing you to express yourself in writing the foreign language? (5 4 3 2 1)
19. Helping you in other college courses? (5 4 3 2 1)
20. (ANSWER THIS ITEM ONLY IF YOU ARE GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE) What value has your foreign language study had in helping you in your job? (5 4 3 2 1)
21. (ANSWER THIS ITEM ONLY IF YOU HAVE TRAVELED TO THE COUNTRY WHERE YOUR FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN) Of what value was your foreign language study in making your travel in the foreign country more rewarding? (5 4 3 2 1)

GENERAL INFORMATION (Student)

1. Student classification _____
(Sophomore, Junior, etc.)

2. Major field of study _____

3. Foreign language studied _____

4. Would you take a foreign language if it were not a degree requirement?

( ) Yes
( ) No

5. Do you recommend a foreign language requirement for graduation?

( ) Yes
( ) No

6. How could foreign language study have been made more valuable for you?

GENERAL INFORMATION (Faculty)

1. Your present profession_____

2. City and State of residence_____

3. Year Bachelor's degree received _____ Major field of study_____

4. Name of college_____ Location_____

5. Foreign language studied on undergraduate level_____

6. Number of credit hours of undergraduate foreign language taken_____

7. Quarter or semester hours?_____

8. Foreign language studied in high school_____ Number of years___

9. Why did you enroll in foreign language courses during your undergraduate studies? ( ) Degree requirement
( ) Elective

10. Would you have taken these foreign language courses if not a degree requirement? ( ) Yes
( ) No

11. Do you recommend foreign language study as a general university requirement for the Bachelor's degree? ( ) Yes
( ) No

12. (ANSWER THIS ITEM ONLY IF YOU EARNED DEGREES BEYOND THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE)

Advanced degree(s)_____Year_____
Major field_____
Foreign language studied for advanced degree_____